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C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 002496

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [KWMN](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: MORE RESTRICTIONS ON WOMEN'S MINISTRY

REF: BAGHDAD 2256

Classified By: ACTING POLCOUNS HENRY ENSHER FOR REASONS  
1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY. Minister of State for Women's Affairs Azhar Sheikhly told PolOff on June 9 that the Council of Ministers denied her request to elevate the status of the Women's Ministry (refTel). Transitional National Assembly member (TNA) Faiezah Baba Khan will now raise the issue for TNA consideration. State ministries are now required to get permission from the Council of Ministers to conduct business with the major ministries, further limiting their effectiveness. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) Minister of State for Women's Affairs Azhar Sheikhly told PolOff on June 9 that the Council of Ministers' legal advisor denied her request to elevate the status of the Women's Ministry (refTel). According to Sheikhly, the advisor told her that he failed even to see the need for such a ministry so could not support her request. Sheikhly said she submitted to the Council a letter of protest stating the denial was based on the personal bias of the advisor and, therefore, not legal.

13. (C) Sheikhly told PolOff that Transitional National Assembly (TNA) member Faiezah Baba Khan (PUK) agreed to raise to the TNA the need for the Women's Ministry to be an independent organization. Sheikhly was cautiously optimistic about the possibility of success, but emphasized the difficulties the Ministry currently faces on every level in the absence of a budget and autonomy. According to Sheikhly, the Ministry is allotted 43 employees -- to include 25 guards -- but does not contract with them directly. The Council of Ministers determines employees' salaries and enters into contracts with them. Sheikhly complained that she is trying to hire an advisor, but the salary offered by the Council of Ministers is too paltry to attract qualified candidates.

14. (C) Minister Sheikhly further stated that her operational effectiveness is limited by new constraints placed on her by the Council of Ministers. Although she previously was allowed to contact other ministers directly, she is now forbidden to do so without specific permission by the Council of Ministers. (NOTE: The Minister of State for Civil Affairs, Ala'a Habib Khadim, told PolOff on June 12 that state ministries are required to request Council of Ministry permission in order to conduct business with the major ministries. Khadim added that the Council of Ministries regards state ministries as no more than government consultants, suggesting that such ministries should be eliminated. END NOTE.)

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COMMENT  
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15. (C) The necessity of the Women's Ministry and its lack of independence has been debated since its inception. However, during the constitutional drafting process -- particularly given the likely debate over the rights of women -- the Women's Ministry could play a role in facilitating the dialogue amongst the Constitutional Committee, the Government, non-governmental organizations, and the general public. END COMMENT.

16. (U) REO HILLA, REO BASRA, REO MOSUL, and REO KIRKUK, Minimize considered.

Jeffrey